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SUBJECT: ALBANIA WELCOMES CODEL TANNER

¶1. (U) Embassy Tirana warmly welcomes the Tanner Congressional Delegation to Albania February 22, to assess Albania's readiness for NATO.

#### Overview

¶2. (U) Albania has made good progress on NATO- and EU-oriented reforms and is committed to continuing implementation. Albania is a valuable partner in maintaining regional security, demonstrated most consistently in its constructive engagement on Kosovo and its significant contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Albania has contributed to the GWOT by keeping Weapons of Mass Destruction out of the hands of terrorists. In July it became the first country to destroy its stockpile of chemical agents and is making progress in eliminating over 100,000 tons of surplus munitions. While Albania has made progress to confront the challenges of rule of law and the fight against corruption, consistent implementation of reforms achieved or in progress is the next challenge. A persistent criticism by the Allies has been that the Government and opposition have not been able to work together for the good of the country. As one sign of a possible break-through, on January 21, an opposition-sponsored resolution calling for unity and declaring NATO accession to be Albania's number one goal passed with a unanimous vote in Parliament. This is the first time an opposition-sponsored resolution has been passed unanimously by the Parliament in Albania's democratic history.

#### Contributions to Regional and Global Stability and Security

¶3. (SBU) Albania contributes significantly to Balkan and global stability and security. GOA officials and opposition leaders serve as a moderating influence on the ethnic Albanian populations in Kosovo and neighboring states and support the international community's efforts to resolve Kosovo's status in a peaceful manner. The GOA has pledged to remain a positive force in these and other international spheres, including, for example, its membership on the Board of Governors of the IAEA. As a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Albania used Nunn-Lugar funding to destroy its stockpile of chemical weapons and agents, and became the first country under the CWC to do so. It is also making progress in destroying over 100,000 tons of surplus munitions, including seamines, torpedoes, aerial bombs and depth charges. The GOA has indicated that it is willing to destroy its MANPADS as well.

¶4. (SBU) Albania's commitment to Iraq and Afghanistan deployments has also been consistent and gratifying; in both cases, Albania had troops on the ground at the outset of operations, despite its limited financial and human resources. With almost 400 troops deployed at any given time, Albania has the greatest number per capita of troops deployed on NATO and Coalition missions than any other Ally.

#### Democracy, Rule of Law, Anti-Corruption

¶5. (U) With less than two decades of democratic history, Albania continues to bolster its democratic institutions and free market

mechanisms. The GOA has passed legislation to strengthen the political independence and to improve professionalization of the Albanian State Police; established more efficient structures to fight corruption and organized crime, including the recent formation of a Joint Investigative Unit to increase coordination between law enforcement and the judiciary; and entered into agreements to enhance regional economic cooperation and to impede cross-border trafficking. Elected on an anti-corruption platform, Prime Minister Sali Berisha has repeatedly stated that this issue is one of his government's highest priorities. The GOA selected corruption as its most important Millennium Challenge category.

¶6. (U) An early success of the newly established Joint Investigative Unit (JIU) was the September arrest of three high-level Ministry of Transport officials, including a Deputy Minister. While many low-level officials have been arrested for corruption, these were the highest level arrests since 2002 and may indicate that the fight against corruption is gaining in strength and professionalism. The JIU fosters better cooperation among crime-fighting institutions, including prosecution, investigation and intelligence. (The JIU was founded with Embassy support and encouragement, in particular the Department of Justice's Overseas Prosecutorial Development and Training program.) In an unrelated action, Minister of Foreign Affairs Basha was accused in September by former Prosecutor General Sollaku of abuse of office in connection with the Bechtel Durres-Kukes Highway award when Basha was Minister of Transportation. Basha says that the accusations are politically motivated, and, in a show of confidence, voted to lift his own parliamentary immunity.

¶7. (U) The Parliamentary Committee on Legal Issues is working on a package of laws to make the judiciary more independent and transparent. Reform of Albania's judiciary to provide greater transparency and efficiency is a key requirement for NATO

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membership.

¶8. (U) Former Prosecutor General Sollaku, considered by the Prime Minister and his governing coalition as a roadblock to prosecuting organized crime and high-level corruption, was replaced last summer by Ina Rama, a former judge. Rama has stated her intent to improve efficiency in the Prosecutor's Office and to defend the institution's independence. Rama plans to travel to Washington and other cities on an International Visitors Program in February to observe rule of law and the criminal justice system as practiced in the U.S. and may be meeting with high level officials.

#### Electoral Reform

¶9. (U) OSCE experts believe the GOA is on track to complete its new automated civil registry by summer 2008. The second technical element of electoral reform is the issuance of improved identity cards. A request for proposal to implement a system for biometric ID cards and passports was issued in November with bids due February 28. The GOA is projecting it will begin issuing biometric documents in December 2008. Concerning reform of the electoral system itself, a bipartisan Parliamentary commission is evaluating various proposals, but has made little concrete legislative progress.

#### Trafficking In Persons

¶10. (SBU) The GOA has a National Action Plan for 2005 - 2007 which lays out goals and how it would meet them. It has consistently worked toward these goals, but has sometimes fallen short of reaching them. The Plan highlights the National Referral Mechanism, which is designed to coordinate government and private resources (anti-trafficking and customs police, NGOs, and social workers) to identify victims and refer them for appropriate services. The GOA needs to continue efforts toward better coordination. In 2005 Albania signed an agreement with Greece to improve anti-trafficking coordination. Albania has ratified it; Greece has not. Albania is working with Kosovo and Macedonia on similar agreements. There are criminal penalties for trafficking, which are enforced. Albania is a Tier-2 country on the State Department's 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report.

## Regional Issues - Kosovo

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¶11. (SBU) The Government and Opposition strongly support Kosovo's independence as proposed in the Ahtisaari plan and have used close relationships with Kosovar political leaders to urge moderation and cooperation with international leadership through the Contact Group and the UN. Albanian leaders have expressed concern that unrest and violence in Kosovo could reflect badly on Albania, possibly hurting Albania's chances for NATO and EU membership. Albania has offered Kosovo economic help in the event of a Serbian embargo. Foreign Minister Basha, in his January 29 meeting with Secretary Rice, reiterated Albania's full support for and coordination with the U.S. policy on Kosovo.

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